

## **The Politics of Lace in Kate Evans' Threads: From the Refugee Crisis (2017)**

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## RESEARCH

# The Politics of Lace in Kate Evans' *Threads: From the Refugee Crisis* (2017)

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Kate Evans' 2017 comic *Threads: From the Refugee Crisis* chronicles her visits to the 'Jungle' refugee camp in Calais, where she volunteered with a group of other British nationals to help build shelters and offer general assistance to those in the camp. The comic is bookended with double-page spreads that depict traditional lace making processes. Calais is particularly famous for lace production and it is a trade that has long been the domain of women. In addition, lace is used throughout the comic in the gutters of the pages.

Using close textual and visual analysis, this article considers the use of lace throughout the comic. Beginning with a brief history of the fabric itself, it is argued that the use of lace provides a clear socio-political and cultural framework by which we can read the comic, positioning the stories of refugees within representational frameworks governed by white, European artistic and cultural production. Moreover, the lace can be read as a metaphor for the geopolitical interactions which led to the massive displacement of people and, so, the creation of 'the Jungle'.

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**Keywords:** Biopolitics; Class; Geopolitics; Migration; Privilege

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Kate Evans' 2017 comic *Threads: From the Refugee Crisis* is an account of Evans' trips to the 'Jungle' refugee camp in Calais in 2015. Over the course of the comic, she outlines the trips she and her husband took to the site, and to another in nearby Dunkirk. Evans talks with many of the refugees in these camps, she joins volunteer squads to sort through donations and helps in any way she is able. In this article, I consider one specific artistic choice made in the creation of the book – the use of lace in the gutters of each page. I discuss the use of lace as a part of the overall scaffolding of the narrative, with special focus on the first and last pages.

Using close textual and visual analysis, I offer a reading of the use of lace that demonstrates how the history, geopolitics, and gendered dimensions of lacemaking create a theoretical framework for the analysis of Evans' book. I juxtapose this with

readings of lace history, and theories of production and artistic reproduction, to suggest that the use of lace gutters in the comic – as well as the bookending of the entire book with images of lacemaking – creates a gilded cage for those whose stories are told. Lace becomes both a visual metaphor of the cage and a literal barrier on the page. By representing the stories of refugees within lace frames, the overall narrative can be viewed through the lens of European colonialism, postcolonial foreign policy, and violence – the very machinations that make camps such as the Jungle a necessity in the first place due to forced displacement and movement of people.

Lace is present on almost every page of Evans' comic, as demonstrated in **Figure 1**. It fills the gutters between panels, placed in a rough, collage style, often overlapping.



**Figure 1:** Kate Evans (2017) *Threads from the Refugee Crisis* (New York: Verso, 58). © Verso New York. Image presented with permission of Kate Evans and Verso.

On occasion, it is used as a background to a full-page image, which sits on top of the fabric without making reference to it. The overall feel is reminiscent of Lynda Barry's use of collage in *One! Hundred! Demons!* (2002); Evans makes reference to this being an inspiration of hers in a 2017 interview published in this journal (Davies 2017: 8). She recounts a visit to the Calais Museum of Lace and Fashion (*Cité de la Dentelle et de la Mode*), adding:

I just 'saw' that I would have to do the comic on a rough paper background so that the lace would form the edges of the frames. I have a lot of photos of lace from various sources stored on my computer in a file marked 'no borders'. Lynda Barry's book, *One! Hundred! Demons!*, is a favourite of mine, so I may have been subconsciously influenced by her use of collage (Evans, quoted in Davies 2017: 8).

Different types of lace are used to denote different chapters and locations. For the most part, Evans uses mismatched white strips, with highly intricate patterns. However, 'the Dunkirk camp has grey lace which looks like raindrops; the scenes in Hoshyar's hut [in the 'Jungle'] have one particular border, and the scenes in the warehouse have another' (Evans, quoted in Davies 2017: 8). She actively uses the lace gutters to 'help orient the reader in the narrative' (Evans, quoted in Davies 2017: 8). Candida Rifkind points to the rare instances of brightly coloured lace used during 'Kate's frenetic shopping trip to a discount supermarket' and to highlight 'Kate's purple jacket in the sequence about "invisible cricket" (participants play with an imaginary ball and bat)' with the purple also used in a scene in the art therapy tent on the following pages (2020: 303). The decision is clear, makes good narrative sense, and works to include the artistic history of the location in the narrative. However, there is more at play.

### **A Very Brief History of Lace**

Before I move to a close reading of two images within the comic, I need to offer a brief history of lace as a fabric. It is impossible to say where lace was first made, or when, but most sources point to fifteenth-century northern Europe as the most likely birthplace. It is likely that the practice of weaving or sewing strands of fabric into patterns dates back into antiquity (see Goldenberg 1904 ; Bury Palliser 1869;

St Clair 2018). There are examples of fabrics that appear to be lace-like (if not lace by contemporary definition) dating back as early as 2500 BCE; intricate knotted baskets made from hair and bristle have been found in Egyptian tombs of the period. However, these are more accurately named proto-lace, using similar techniques to the fabric as we now know it but not necessarily contributing to its development. In the opening paragraph of his 1904 book, *Lace, Its Origin and History*, Samuel Goldenberg points to this lack of clarity, adding 'there is a general agreement, however, that lace, as the term is understood today, is a comparatively modern product' (1904: 1).

A quick glance at portraiture from the late fifteenth century will show a large number of wealthy individuals wearing simple lace collars, which became increasingly intricate as fashions and creative technologies developed into the sixteenth century. An early pattern book, the *Nüw Modelbuch*, was printed in Zurich in 1561 and presents many simple designs to be made using bobbins. There are, broadly speaking, two different types of lace, which use different materials and tools, but the most common is bobbin lace. Threads are wound onto carved bobbins (often made from bone, ivory, or wood) and are interwoven over a pillow, being held in place by pins to hold the tension of the threads and maintain the design.<sup>1</sup> It is intensely complicated work: a 1cm square will take a skilled creator up to five hours (Honiton Museum 2010: n.p.). The popularity of the fabric as a decoration among the upper classes is likely tied to the sumptuary laws that were in effect all over Europe for many centuries, having also been in effect in Ancient Greece and Rome. A statute issued at Greenwich in June 1574 suggests that 'the excess of apparel and the superfluity of unnecessary foreign wares' were responsible for 'the wasting and undoing of a great number of young gentlemen' (Elizabethan.org 2001: n.p.). Such laws were in line with strict Protestant edicts against vanity and frivolity across Europe; thus, delicate and expensive lace filled a market gap – luxury that is not outwardly flashy.

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<sup>1</sup> Such techniques are commonly seen in lace workshops in cities including Brussels, Brugge, and Cluny. There are videos available online that give some idea of the huge amount of skill, concentration, and dexterity required for lacemaking.

Throughout its development, lace in general has been tied to privilege – and lacemaking in particular has been the domain of women. Given the huge time commitment that goes into making a material that has no use beyond aesthetic, the privilege of time is evident in its production. Furthermore, lacemaking requires a clean environment, with good light, that is conducive to slow and repetitive work. The privilege of a woman being able to engage in such labour without being required to work in the home or in any of the roles generally taken up by women in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, suggest a woman of some means. Needlework and fibre arts have long been considered tasks taken up by women and there was a general understanding that, as Adrian Poyntz wrote in 1591, 'these works belong chiefly to Gentlewomen for to passe away their time in virtuous exercises' (St Clair 2018: 140). The most famous artistic rendering of lacemaking attests to this. Johannes Vermeer's *The Lacemaker* (c 1699) shows a young woman bent over a lacemaking pillow, with bobbins in hand. The technique Vermeer depicts is virtually identical to the techniques still in use today. Kassia St Clair suggests that this painting is 'a meditation on craft, creativity, and the human capacity to spin beauty out of the humblest materials' (2018: 139). While this is true – the young woman is keenly engrossed in her labours – is it also an image of female domesticity and 'acceptable' artistic endeavours. It is not the purpose of this article to argue for typically feminine artistic pursuits to be rightly categorised as 'art', recognised alongside painting, sculpture, and other media. It is enough for the purposes of my argument to state that lace is carefully bound up in the culture of northern Europe and the politics of luxury, as well as the gender politics of artistic expression.

### **Lace as Visual Metaphor**

Bookending the comic with lacemaking frames the story of refugees in explicitly Western artistic terms. For refugees from a conflict or post-conflict area, coming to Europe only to be forced into camps where basic human rights are largely suspended, can be akin to being put behind walls lined by privilege and luxury, close enough to see and touch, but not to partake. Lace is a European creation, and one that speaks to luxury and privilege. In using it to bookend the narrative – and to fill the gutters of

the comic's page – Evans is providing an explicit understanding that the framework that underpins her work is built on Western privilege and, by extension, colonialism. On the first page, lace is making the walls, representing the Western foreign policy and geopolitical machinations that lead to the 'Jungle' and the wider displacement of people from conflict zones. On the last, there is more lace churning off the loom – there is more where that came from, both in terms of fabric and displacement. She is couching the stories of displaced, oppressed population groups within cultural frameworks of the oppressor. Furthermore, lace is a fabric that was made by women, often, as a type of creative 'busywork' or 'virtuous exercises', as Poyntz would have it (St Clair 2018: 140). It is a fabric with no particular use but to be decorative. The gender politics of this reading of women's creative endeavour is undeniable but moreover it ties this item to luxury, to non-essential labour, and to privilege.

The comic opens with a full-page borderless panel showing an aerial view of the town of Calais in the background, with a group of seated women in seventeenth-century clothing (dark colours and head coverings were especially favoured in Protestant communities) in the foreground, as shown in **Figure 2**.

Each woman holds a large bundle of bobbins, each wound with an individual thread. This is not a strictly accurate rendering as the women are not using pillows and pins to hold the lace, but the point is clear. The threads then merge into the high, white fences which flank the motorway into Calais and form a barrier around the port area in the background of the image. By Evans' own description and skin tone choices, the majority of people living in the Jungle are not white. The accompanying narration is presented as type-written text on stained paper, placed on top of the image. In the manner of a first-person diary, Evans writes:

1st October 2015. The first thing we see... White fences stream along the highway. Metres high. Miles long. The smooth steel lacework glistens in the evening sun. Calais. The city was famous for its lacemaking. The meticulous toil of women and girls sitting outside to make the most of the daylight. Nimble fingers. Bobbins dancing. Continuously twisting the threads (2017: 7).





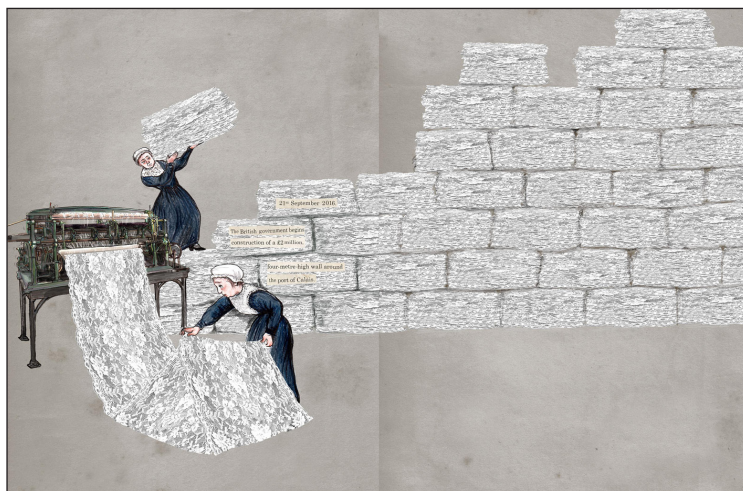
**Figure 2:** Kate Evans (2017) *Threads from the Refugee Crisis* (New York: Verso, 7). © Verso New York. Image presented with permission of Kate Evans and Verso.

The coming together of word and image is striking. As Evans describes the fences, using lace to describe the woven nature of the metal, the words on the page move closer to the women. The fences visually become lacework on the page. This does two things. First, it gives a visual representation of the fences as constructed. These are structures that are built by humans for the purpose of restricting movement, of containing other humans. It is important to remember that the borders and barriers that are built and represented in *Threads* are placed there for specific reasons that lead to the 'encampment' of other human beings. The fences cannot help but lead



to camp – building and the creation of camp spaces in which human beings exist in peculiar limbo. Following the work of Giorgio Agamben, we can see the camp as ‘the most absolute biopolitical space ever to have been realized’ (Agamben 1998: 171). According to Agamben, camp spaces allow the control of population groups at the level of biology and, in stripping groups of their right to exist within society (to vote, own property, move freely), they are reduced to what he calls ‘bare life’: ‘This is why the camp is the very paradigm of political space at the point of which politics becomes biopolitics and homo sacer is virtually confused with the citizen’ (Agamben 1998: 171). Agamben references the figure of the homo sacer from Roman law as the man who can be killed, but not sacrificed. He exists but has no social position to make him ‘worthy’. In highlighting the human-made construction of the fences – and by extension the human-made constraints that they represent. Evans is positioning herself in relation to the divisive and enduring discussion on refugees and the widespread movement of people.

The second point is the crux of my argument here. In opening (and closing) her comic by explicitly showing the lacemaking history of Calais, Evans is providing an analytical lens through which to view the entire comic, both in terms of its art and its themes. Before I explain this point in full, let us turn to the very last double-page spread, shown in **Figure 3**.



**Figure 3:** Kate Evans (2017) *Threads from the Refugee Crisis* (New York: Verso, 176–177).  
© Verso New York. Image presented with permission of Kate Evans and Verso.

Here, across two pages, Evans shows two women in sombre nineteenth-century clothing taking lace from a lacemaking machine. Such machines were developed during the nineteenth century, with an early, successful example being John Heathcoat's bobbinet machine, patented in 1808. The women are stacking large bundles of fabric in what appears to be a rudimentary wall, arranged as if laying bricks. The text, which again appears as typeset font on stained paper, reads '21<sup>st</sup> September 2016. The British government begins construction of a £2 million, four-metre-high wall around the port of Calais' (Evans, 2017: 176). By closing the book with this image, Evans is not only showing a major development in the history of lacemaking that mechanised a largely female workforce and changed both the creative possibilities but also the purchase possibilities of lace. The mechanisation of lace manufacture in the 19<sup>th</sup> century meant that its luxury status diminished somewhat, as the fabric became more affordable. Moreover, Evans is hinting at a narrative continuity. Lace – and, by extension of the visual metaphor, also walls – is still being made, will continue to be made, and will be made quicker, cheaper, and more widely than before. It is a point of cruel irony that the lace machines used in Calais are British and the money for the new, larger wall is similarly coming from the UK. The first and last pages create narrative bookends that provide a scaffolding for analysis of the comic as a whole, as well as laying out the position of Evans as chronicler and creator. In closing the narrative loop, the lace fence is complete.

There is a further dimension to consider in these two images: the representation of the increased mechanisation of the workforce in general, and of lace production in particular, and how this furthers the metaphor of encampment. Evans is outspoken in her Marxist views and her political affiliation permeates her art. The clearest example of this is her 2015 graphic biography of Rosa Luxemburg, titled *Red Rosa*. This book offers a comprehensive (and in many ways generous) biography of Luxemburg, while also bringing her work into the twenty-first century. In several places, Evans draws herself as narrator, explaining and debating the contemporary relevance of Luxemburg's work and activism. While the only lace in *Red Rosa* is that which adorns the characters' clothing (all white, middle-class women, we should note), there is a heavy focus on the Marxist ideals that underpin her life's work – a central ideal being production. The mechanisation process not only gives

us products quicker and cheaper, but it affects the way in which the 'thing' exists: 'its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be' (Benjamin 2008: 5). In his essay, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', Marxist scholar Benjamin talks specifically about works of art as discrete objects and how changes in production and reproduction technologies have changed them. A work of art such as a piece of handwrought lace is markedly different to a piece of machine-made lace. The marks of creation are different, the means of production speak to a different level of engagement between creator and object. The 'aura' of the work shrinks in 'an age where the work of art can be reproduced by technological means' (Benjamin 2008: 7). Lace made by hand is an extremely expensive material, but machine-made lace is cheaply and widely available – the aura of wealth, of luxury, and of exclusivity is changed. Benjamin uses the word '*Echtheit*' (translated as 'genuineness' or 'authenticity') to describe the aura – a word with connotations of money and monetary value, typically used to suggest something is genuine and therefore of greater value (such as diamonds, for example). For him, reproductive technology 'removes the thing reproduced from the realm of tradition' (2008: 7).

If I bring this argument back to Evans' book, we can see two ways in which Benjamin's theory can be brought to it. The first considers the juxtaposition of hand-drawn image and photograph. During a conversation with a young resident of the Jungle, Evans, her husband, and their friend all show photographs of their families on mobile phones. The images are presented within the comic as hand-drawn, rather than reproduced photographs. The movement from mechanical reproduction back into hand-drawn art is a curious move, but is likely a decision made to protect the identity of Evans' children. Nevertheless, the decision to reproduce images by hand (a lengthier process) than simply including the photograph stands against Benjamin's contention that we are moving more into an age of mechanisation of art. In a later episode, Evans does include a photograph of a person. She is drawing in the art tent and meets a man from Newcastle who had come to collect his young nephew but was not able to take the child back to the UK. The photograph shows the man holding the portrait just painted (Evans 2007: 113). Its inclusion is curious; it

stands as both a sign of the 'truth' of the events – that Evans really is painting people in the Jungle – and also a comparison of the two men, the real and the artistic. The aura of the original is contained within a mechanical representation of the original, as well as the model. We could see this as a statement on the absurdity of art in the age of the smartphone (in which everyone has high tech reproduction capabilities in their pocket) or a simple comparison of the whole, albeit with the favour placed on the photograph.

To return to the lace, it is possible to extend the reading of the mechanisation further, engaging with both Benjamin and Marx. The movement towards mechanisation – a move that allowed for faster production and therefore higher profit – is bound up in capitalist shifts in industry and production. Marx suggests that practice (that is, the making of a thing) objectifies human power. If workers relate to their product, it is an expression of themselves, a positive and affirming experience. He writes,

In my production I would have objectified my individuality, its specific character, and therefore enjoyed not only an individual manifestation of my life during the activity, but also when looking at the object I would have the individual pleasure of knowing my personality to be objective, visible to the senses and hence a power beyond all doubt (Marx 1986: 33).

However, to remove the identification of worker and object leads to alienation and, as Marx shows, the labour characteristics of wage labour correspond to the most profound form of alienation. Wage workers sell their labour power, meaning the capitalist owns the labour process, so the product is not of the work, but of the capitalist. The development of alienation can be seen in the two bookending images – the first depicting women handmaking lace and the second showing the operation of a machine which is doing the making. The shift is made visible. We can go even further and suggest that the labour that builds the wall around the Jungle is likewise alienated from the labourer – the creation of the wall itself is dependent on capitalist structures of wage labour for its existence and the separation between product and labour exists both literally in the image (the women at work on the lace machine) and in its underlying meaning (capitalism is the force behind the encampment of refugees).

### Three Qualities of Lace

There are three specific key qualities of lace that, when read through the lens of refugee movement and encampment, have particular relevance to the text's cultural and socio-political frameworks. Lace is typically white. This is, of course, not to say that all lace is white but traditionally this is the case. As a decorative fabric, lace has connotations of purity and fragility, partly due to its delicate physical nature, but also because it is often associated with Baptismal gowns, wedding dresses, and clothing not designed to be worn for physical exertion. As a white fabric, there is an added layer of privilege and decoration – white fabric is not practical for those who must engage in physical labour as it is difficult to keep clean without tremendous effort (or a washing machine). The majority of the lace used in *Threads* is white. Drawing on artist Roland Rood's concept of white as 'the only neutral we can conceive' (Rood, quoted in Dyer 1997, 46), Richard Dyer writes, 'The idea of whiteness as neutrality already suggests its usefulness for designating a social group that is to be taken for the human ordinary' (Dyer 1997, 47). This usefulness equates to tremendous privilege and access to luxury that is not granted to others. Dyer writes at length about the different processes and treatments undertaken by people of colour to lighten their skin, dating back to antiquity. By its associations and connotations of neutrality, and furthermore purity, beauty, and wealth, a person's whiteness puts them in a position of tremendous power and privilege. The women shown in *Threads* as lace-makers are all white, as are the vast majority of artistic depictions of lacemaking from the fifteenth century onwards. That the producers are not only white but white *women* adds a further layer to the metaphor. Dyer writes, 'Idealised white women are bathed in, and permeated by, light. It streams through them and falls onto them from above. In short. they glow' (Dyer 1997, 117). Darker skin tones do not connote the same ethereal, heavenly appearance. There is a lack of physicality associated with this glow, as well as a delicacy and ephemerality, as if white women themselves are a luxury and a privilege, as well as carrying privilege by their skin tone. In contrast, women of colour, and especially black women, are subject to more overt sexualisation. Historically, the linking of black people (of all genders) to animals and bestial traits is well-documented:



One example of this is the historical case of Saartjie Baartman, who was a South African slave unwillingly sent to London in the early 1800s to be exhibited as part of a freak show. Displayed in a cage and wearing next to nothing, Saartjie was paraded around circuses, museums, and bars, where onlookers paid to poke, prod, and gawk at her atypical (to most Londoners) large buttocks and features. In the eyes of White Europeans, Saartjie, who came to be known as the Hottentot Venus, was not considered fully human (Butcher, 2002), justifying her subjugation and objectification (Anderson, Holland, Heldreth and Johnson 2018: 461).

Though discrimination against women has a long history for all races, white women's experiences are not compounded by their skin colour, as happens to women of colour.

Not only does the whiteness of lace reference the whiteness of lace history and production, but also the racial make-up of the comic itself. The general demarcation in the comic is between white characters (who are volunteers in the Jungle, or politicians giving statements at press conferences) and POC characters (who are refugees, current and former, as well as those in service roles in the UK). Evans describes her use of different skin tones as 'a kind of apartheid' (Evans, quoted in Davies 2017: 8). She states that 'all the Africans, Arab/Afghan/Iranians and White Europeans are done with three different base tones to give a visual echo to the social divisions that they are subject to' (Evans, quoted in Davies 2017: 8). The image of lace is particularly jarring here, not only because it is white, but because it is *only* white. In the opening scene of the comic, Evans describes the Jungle as 'a microcosmic Disunited Nations. Over here is Afghanistan... and over there is Sudan. Eritreans? Syrians? Iraqis?' (2017: 8). The camp itself is a multinational and multicultural mix of identities. Unlike the monocoloured lace, the Jungle is a multicoloured coming together of threads. Rather than destabilising the lace metaphor, the Jungle's multiculturalism is part of a critical statement on the nature of the camp as a space.

Of course, the use of skin tones to represent diverse ethnic and geographic groups creates a bold visual metaphor that is easily read within the comic. The literal

colour of the skin distinguishes the groups. As human skin tones are far less clear-cut than this, it is not a perfect metaphor, but it works well in this instance. What it does juxtaposes the multiculturalism of the Jungle with the largely white population of northern France.<sup>2</sup> No comic is a true representation of the world as it is; instead it is constructed by the artist to present an image of the world, according to their perceptions and personal inclinations. Evans creates the Jungle on paper in a way that highlights the differences between the camp as a multicultural group and Calais as distinctly the opposite. Alongside the use of different skin tones, there are significant issues in the physical representation of the refugee characters. Manea and Precup suggest that they 'are drawn in a manner that likens them to children in terms of their facial features and posture [...] in order to render the figure of the refugee less threatening to Western audiences (2020: 481–482). When we consider the infantilized portrayals of refugees, lumped together by their common 'childness' (to use Manea and Precup's word), alongside the depictions of fuming, expressive, white female politicians (Marine Le Pen and Theresa May), the comparison is stark. Emotions, nuance, and expression of an adult nature is allowed to white women, but not to refugees. Their collective position is one of encamped childlike bashfulness.

Lace is a decorative fabric. It has no practical purpose beyond decoration – it does not provide warmth or waterproofing, nor does it improve tensile strength. This is not to diminish the importance of beauty and aesthetics, but to show that it is non-essential, especially in the context of a refugee camp, which highlights again the idea of lace as being tied to privilege; its use here is representative of how the privileges and luxuries we enjoy in Europe have previously imprisoned, and continue to imprison, those outside our economic sphere, with many of them created by slave labour or gained by force during periods of colonial rule. The depictions of lace-making in the first and last pages contrast strongly with other depictions of labour

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<sup>2</sup> It is illegal for the French state to collect data on ethnicity; this was codified in the 1958 French Constitution; the collection of census data on race and ethnic origin were banned by the French Government in 1978. It is therefore impossible to accurately say what proportion of the French population is white. However, I can say that the *Institut National de la Statistique et des Études Économiques* reports that only 2.6% of the population of the Pas-de-Calais *département* is categorised as an immigrant (INSEE 2020: n.p.).

throughout the comic. Evans draws herself as being involved in different types of labour, most of them both communal and essential: building shelters, sorting donations, providing supplies. Depictions of labour are split between three groups: men and boys of all ethnicities, refugee women, and white volunteers. Building tasks are shown as being the domain of men and boys, with Evans showing all skin tones taking part (2017: 9, 17). Many people are involved, the mood is convivial, and the goal is clear. This is essential labour that is also community-building.

In contrast, refugee women's labour is distinctly individual. In a short episode in the Dunkirk camp, Evans recounts her friend Jet, a midwife, visiting a pregnant woman who is alone with her children (2017: 85–86). Responsibility for the whole family falls to her, as well as managing her pregnancy. This is markedly different from the communal, male-focused labour depicted elsewhere. In a separate section, Jet sets up a women's space for mothers to look after their children, access clean feeding equipment, and breastfeed (2017: 114–115). Though this is a space for community engagement, each small family is drawn in a clearly separate space: there is no interaction between women and the labour remains individual.

Throughout the comic, Evans shows the art life of the Jungle. In one section, she visits the 'Good Chance Theatre Dome' and meets Sue, a fellow artist whose goal was to see if art was needed (2017: 33–35). Evans writes, 'Sue found something at the Jungle that broke through linguistic and cultural boundaries. Art' (2017: 35). Though it is non-essential and mostly individual, art is demonstrated to be a vital part of living in the Jungle; it allows those who live there to express themselves, to create something beyond that which is necessary for survival, and to remember 'home'. By this reading, the representation of lacemaking – and the presence of lace in the gutters – speaks to the diversity of labour represented in the comic: from communal, male-dominated building to individual, woman-led caregiving, and the spectrum of essential (building) to non-essential (art) labour.

Lace is tied to a specific geographic region. As I have already shown, lacemaking finds its origins in Europe, specifically Italy, the Netherlands, France, and Belgium. Calais is a key location in this history, though its origins are not as we may assume. Though 'Calais' status as a centre of French lacemaking predates the French

Revolution', it is not this particular type of lace that put Calais on the map, so to speak (Rifkind 2020: 303). The bobbin lace image which opens *Threads*, handwoven from the sixteenth century, is more at home in Belgium and the Lorraine region of France. Calais lace derives from Nottingham and the development of mechanical methods of production led by Heathcoat and Lindley, among others. In 1816, a group of English lacemakers smuggled a machine into Calais and set up a workshop. Calais was a popular choice of location for migrant lacemakers, due to its proximity to the English Channel; it also allowed escape from English patent exploitation levies (see MacLeod 1991).

The lace bookending and gutters signal a cultural and socio-political framework that is bound up in northern European colonialism. More specifically, the two political powers made most prominent are the UK and France, as Evans is a British artist and the Jungle is in France and politicians from both countries are referenced in the comic (2017: 10, 18). Calais lace is a perfect visual metaphor for this dual national focus. It brings together the home country of the artist through whose eyes we witness the experiences of the Jungle with the wide-reaching ramifications of British and French colonial histories and foreign policy. By representing the stories of refugees within lace frames, the overall narrative can be viewed through the lens of European colonialism, postcolonial foreign policy, and violence – the very machinations that make camps such as the Jungle a necessity in the first place due to forced displacement and movement of people. The comic becomes a representative Geopolitical microcosm that makes visible the barriers and constraints placed on refugees through the visual metaphor of lace. The metaphor's representative power is strengthened by the privilege, class connotations, and whiteness inherent in the fabric's history.

Ultimately, although Evans is keen to highlight the individual stories of people, these are not what remains. Though there are many threads in this comic, each distinct and unique, it is in their coming together that we find the crux of the narrative and, furthermore, it is through their interaction with cultural, social, and political contexts that they are given meaning. The attempts made here to create a comic that speaks to both the individual stories and the greater geo- and bio-political position

at play end up making something else altogether. The figures within the comic – including Evans – are unable to do anything to break the lace barriers that keep them contained. By the end of the comic, she is back in the UK and the experiences of those in the Jungle are shown through photographs of newscasts on her smart-phone and tv. The frame that encamps the Jungle has moved from lace to electronic monitor, referring again to the mechanisation, this time of information. The electronic monitor exists as a physical and metaphorical frame that reduces refugees to a stereotyped suffering whole – nuance and personal stories are lost.

Not only are the first and last pages visual-narrative bookends and frame the entire comic and give the reader a lens for analysis, but the presence of lace in the gutters is a constant reminder of two things: the fences and the artist's point of view. Typically, gutters are empty spaces on the page (though their emptiness still holds massive narrative importance) and they do not contain anything – their bare presence is their purpose. (see Groensteen, 2007; Postema 2013; Polak 2017). In filling them with lace, which we have already seen being made into fences on the very first page, they act as a constant reminder of the constraints placed upon the individuals within the comic. Furthermore, they are representative of Evans. Evans is the comic's creator, and it is her position as white, Western woman that governs what is shown and how. The lace can be seen to represent her inability to extricate herself from her own position as a white woman – a position of privilege and power that is not held by the majority of the figures within the comic. I note that, throughout the comic, there are several episodes where a figure cries (often uncontrollably) but these figures are overwhelmingly white (Evans herself on p 64, her son on p 116). Though Evans and her friends travel to the Jungle to help, to provide medical assistance, and to bring something (art, friendship, oranges) to the people within the fences, there is no resolution and by the end of the text, the fence is even higher. Of course, this is an accurate rendering of the political situation and to suggest otherwise would be untrue, but the comic's end comes with no suggestion for further action, nor a call to arms. Benjamin closes his essay on art and mechanisation by writing, 'Communism responds [to Fascism] by politicizing art' (2008: 38). Evans begins the process by giving voice to the Jungle and its inhabitants, but the work is far from complete.



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## Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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